



## United Kingdom

### International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. Centuries-old sectarian divisions and instances of violence persisted in Northern Ireland.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The United Kingdom has an area of 94,525 square miles, and its population in mid-2003 was approximately 59.6 million. The 2001 census for the whole of the United Kingdom reported that approximately 42 million persons (almost 72 percent of the population) identify themselves as Christians. Approximately 1.6 million (2.7 percent) identify themselves as Muslims. The next largest religious groups are Hindus (1 percent), followed by Sikhs (0.6 percent) and Jews (0.5 percent). More than 9 million (15.5 percent) of respondents stated they have no religion. The census's religion question was voluntary, and only 7.3 percent chose not to respond.

Religious affiliation is not evenly distributed among ethnicities. In 2001 census data for Great Britain, approximately 70 percent of the white population described themselves as Christians. Almost 75 percent of black Caribbean respondents stated that they were Christians, as did 70 percent of black Africans. Meanwhile, 45 percent of Indians were Hindus, and 29 percent were Sikhs. Approximately 92 percent of Pakistanis and Bangladeshis were Muslims.

Non-Christian populations are concentrated in London and other large urban areas. London is home to 56 percent of Jews, 52 percent of Hindus, 38 percent of Muslims, and 31 percent of Sikhs. Census figures showed that Muslims, as compared to adherents of other religions, had higher rates of unemployment and ill health and lower rates of educational qualifications.

Information on membership in Christian denominations was not recorded in the 2001 census. In 2003, the Office for National Statistics indicated approximately 29 percent of the population identify with Anglicanism, 10 percent with the Roman Catholic Church, and 14 percent with other Christian churches. An additional 2 percent of the population is affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), the Church of Christ, Christian Scientists, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Unitarians.

In Northern Ireland, the 2001 Census showed that 53.1 percent were Protestants and 43.8 percent were Catholics. Church attendance in Northern Ireland is estimated at 30 to 35 percent. The divisions between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland have largely evolved along religious lines. The policy of the Government remains one of promotion of religious tolerance.

Most Catholics and Protestants continue to live in segregated communities in Northern Ireland, including public housing ("housing estates") and other working class areas, although many middle class neighborhoods are mixed communities. Intimidation by paramilitary gangs often results in members of the minority community leaving housing estates, increasing the level of segregation.

#### Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

##### Legal/Policy Framework

The law provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect and promote this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors. The law provides for the freedom to change one's religion or belief. The 1998 Human Rights Act guarantees freedom of religion and bans discrimination based on religion. Religious discrimination in employment and vocational training was made illegal by the 2003 Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations. The 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act covers "religiously aggravated offenses," based on existing assault, harassment, criminal damage, and public order offenses. Those convicted of "religiously aggravated offenses" face higher maximum penalties where there is evidence of religious hostility in connection with a crime. According to the Crown Prosecution Service's annual report for 2003-04 (published in January), perpetrators of 44 religiously aggravated offenses were prosecuted under the Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act between April 2003 and the end of March 2004. In 22 of the offenses, the actual or perceived religion of the victim was Islam. The Crown Prosecution Service reported a 77 percent conviction rate on the 44 charges.

On July 7, 2004, the Government announced plans to reintroduce legislation making incitement to religious hatred a criminal offense. If enacted, the offense would complement existing legislation prohibiting incitement to racial hatred (which, courts have ruled, covers Sikhs and Jews, but not Muslims, Christians, or Hindus). Originally, the Government had tried to include such an offense in the 2001 Anti-Terrorism, Crime, and Security Act, but the provision was dropped over some peers' concerns about the law's potential implications. In the months after the proposal's reintroduction (as part of the Serious Organized Crime and Police Bill), some members of public and civil society spoke out against the measure. One opponent, comedian Rowan Atkinson, said it was a "fundamental freedom of society" to criticize others' religions. Partly because of this opposition, the offense was removed from the final version of the Serious Organized Crime and Police Bill, which Parliament then passed. On May 17, 2005, the Government announced it would once again introduce legislation containing the offense, this time as a stand-alone bill. Some religious organizations have allied with secularist bodies to oppose the bill, saying it would restrict freedom of speech. The Government maintains that the bill would apply only to extremist organizations that provoke hatred against religious faiths but not criminalize "criticism, commentary, or ridicule" of religions or their adherents. At the end of the period covered by this report, Parliament had not considered the new legislation.

There are two established (or state) churches, the Church of England (Anglican) and the Church of Scotland (Presbyterian). The Monarch is the "Supreme Governor" of the Church of England and always must be a member of the Church and promise to uphold it. The monarch's connection with the Church of England is the subject of ongoing public debate. In 2003, a nongovernmental Commission on the Future of the Monarchy called for the Queen to be stripped of the title of Supreme Governor.

The monarch appoints Church of England officials on the advice of the Prime Minister and the Crown Appointments Commission, which includes lay and clergy representatives. The Church of Scotland appoints its own office bearers, and its affairs are not subject to any civil authority. The Church in Wales, the Scottish Episcopal Church, and the Church of Ireland are members of the Anglican Communion. There are no established churches in Wales or Northern Ireland. A February 2001 Home Office study suggested that the establishment status of the Church of England causes "religious disadvantage" to other religious communities. Those who believe that their freedom of religion has been infringed have the right to appeal to the courts for relief.

The Government has indicated it has no plans to move towards disestablishment of the Church of England unless both the Church and the public favor such a move; furthermore, the Government takes the view that establishment is deeply embedded in the nation's history and in no way indicates a lack of respect for other faiths. Official events take an inclusive approach; for example, the national Remembrance Day Service, conducted under the auspices of the Church of England, also includes representatives of a broad range of faiths. The Government makes efforts to address specific needs of different faith communities, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's provision of a special Hajj delegation to provide consular and medical assistance to British Muslims on pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia.

Religious holy days that are considered national holidays include Good Friday, Easter Monday, and Christmas.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government. No church or religious organization--established or otherwise--receives direct funding from the State. Religious bodies are expected to finance their own activities through endowment, investments, and fund-raising. The Government funds the repair of historic religious buildings, such as cathedrals and churches, but such funding is not restricted to Church of England buildings. A government grants program, financed largely through lottery money, helps to fund repair and maintenance of listed places of worship of all religions nationwide. The Government also contributes to the budget of the Church Conservation Trust, which preserves "redundant" Church of England buildings of architectural or historic significance. Several similar groups in England, Scotland, and Wales repair non-Anglican houses of worship.

Most religious institutions are classified as charities and, as such, enjoy a wide range of tax benefits. (The advancement of religion is considered to be a charitable purpose.) In England and Wales, the Charity Commission reviews the application of each body applying for registration as a charity. Commissioners base their decisions on a substantial body of case law. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, the Inland Revenue performs this task. Charities are exempt from taxes on most types of income and capital gains, provided that the charity uses the income or gains for charitable purposes. They also are exempt from the value-added tax.

The Government provides funding for a large number of so-called "faith schools." As of January 2004, there were 6,903 state-funded schools with a religious character in England. All but 121 of these schools were Anglican, Catholic, or Methodist schools;

there is also a well-established tradition of state support for Jewish schools. The Government has helped set up and fund a number of schools reflecting other religious traditions. These include four Muslim, two Sikh, one Greek Orthodox, and one Seventh-day Adventist school. In January 2005, Chief Inspector of Schools for England, David Bell, called on faith schools to be "intolerant of intolerance." In February 2005, then-Schools Minister for England Stephen Twigg published a list of best practices of how faith schools can implement inclusiveness and collaboration.

In Scotland, most faith-based government-funded schools are Roman Catholic, although there is also a Jewish school. The Scottish Executive has funded an ongoing study into whether faith-based schools promote sectarianism or intolerance.

Almost all schools in Northern Ireland receive state support. In Northern Ireland, more than 90 percent of students attend schools that are either predominantly Catholic or Protestant. Integrated schools serve approximately 5 percent of school-age children whose families voluntarily choose this option, often after overcoming significant obstacles to provide the resources to start a new school and demonstrate its sustainability for 3 years before government funding begins. Demand for places in integrated schools outweighs the limited number of places available.

The law requires religious education in publicly maintained schools throughout the United Kingdom. According to the Education Reform Act of 1988, it forms part of the core curriculum for students in England and Wales. In Scotland, religious education of some sort is mandated by the Education Act of 1980. Throughout the United Kingdom, the shape and content of religious instruction is decided on a local basis. Locally agreed syllabi are required to reflect the predominant place of Christianity while taking into account the teachings and practices of other principal religions in the country. Syllabi must be nondenominational and refrain from attempting to convert pupils.

In addition, schools in England and Wales have to provide a daily act of collective worship. In practice, this action mainly is Christian in character, reflecting Christianity's importance in the religious life of the country. This requirement may be waived if a school's administration deems it inappropriate for some or all of the students. All parents have the right to withdraw a child from religious education, but the schools must approve this request. Under some circumstances, non-Christian worship may instead be allowed. Teachers' organizations have criticized school prayer and called for a government review of the practice.

Where student bodies are characterized by a substantial percentage of religious minorities, schools may observe the religious festivals of other faiths. Schools also endeavor to accommodate religious requirements, such as providing halal meat for Muslim children.

In Northern Ireland, the Fair Employment Act bans employment discrimination on the grounds of religious or political opinion. A broad network of laws, regulations, and oversight bodies work to ensure that there is equal opportunity for employees of all religious faiths. All public sector employers and all private firms with more than 10 employees must report annually to the Equality Commission on the religious composition of their workforces and must review their employment practices every 3 years. Noncompliance may result in criminal penalties and the loss of government contracts. Victims of employment discrimination may sue for damages. In addition, the 1998 Northern Ireland Act stipulates that all public authorities must show due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, including on the basis of religious belief. Each public authority must report its plans to promote equality to the Equality Commission, which is to review such plans every 5 years.

In 2003, Parliament approved the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations of 2003, which adopted a European Commission Directive against religious discrimination. The regulations prohibit employment discrimination based on religious belief, except where there is a "genuine occupational requirement" of a religious nature. The Government attempts to raise awareness of protections under the new regulations through help lines and good-practice advice. The regulations, which specifically do not apply in Northern Ireland, came into force in later in 2003.

The Government makes an active effort to ensure that public servants are not discriminated against on the basis of religion and strives to accommodate religious practices by government employees whenever possible. For example, the Prison Service permits Muslim employees to take time off during their shifts to pray. It also provides prisoners with Christian, Jewish, and Muslim chaplains. The Advisory Group on Religion in Prisons monitors policy and practice on issues relating to religious provision. The military generally provides soldiers who are adherents of minority religions with chaplains of their faith.

The Home Office's Faith Communities Unit is responsible for promoting interfaith contact and ensuring that members of all faith communities enjoy the same life opportunities and government services. The Faith Communities Unit is also undertaking a project of "faith literacy" to improve government employees' understanding of different religious communities. In March 2004, the Home Office published a report, "Working Together: Co-operation between Government and Faith Communities," in partnership with senior faith community representatives. The report specifically recommends measures to ensure that government consultations include relevant input from faith communities when forming policy, to assess the extent to which faith communities benefit from government funding programs, to address funding deficiencies, and to involve the different faith communities in national services and celebrations in a way that reflects the diversity of the country. The Faith Communities Unit is charged with following the report's recommendations, and a Home Office Steering Group was scheduled evaluate the effect of its recommendations in 2005.

#### **Restrictions on Religious Freedom**

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion.

On March 2, 2005, the Court of Appeal ruled that Shabina Begum, a Muslim teenager, had been unlawfully excluded from her high school in Luton for wearing a jilbab, a traditional dress that leaves only the face and hands exposed. The school, which is 79 percent Muslim, had expelled Begum in 2002 for contravening its uniform policy, which had been drawn up after consultation with local Muslim organizations. The school's policy allowed girls to wear a skirt, pants, or a shalwar kameez, which comprises a loose tunic and pants, and to cover their heads with headscarves. After her expulsion, Begum filed suit in the High Court, which ruled in the school's favor. The Court of Appeal then overturned this decision. Some educators observed that the ruling opened a "legal minefield" for schools and called on the Government to provide more concrete guidance about their rights and obligations when it comes to uniform policies.

The 2003 Communications Act increased broadcasting opportunities for religious groups by lifting previous restrictions on religious bodies' ownership of broadcasting licenses. Under the new legislation, religious bodies can hold local and national digital radio and digital terrestrial television licenses. Prior to the law's enactment, religious bodies could hold cable, satellite, and local analog radio licenses. Because of the limited broadcast spectrum, religious groups are still prohibited from holding national analog radio licenses, national television analog licenses, and radio and television multiplex licenses.

According to a 1999 decision of the Charity Commission for England and Wales, a quasi-judicial, independent body established by law as the regulator and registrar for charities, the Church of Scientology does not come within the charity law definition of a religion. The Church of Scientology has not exercised its right of appeal to the court against the commission's decision. Scientology ministers are not considered ministers of religion for the purpose of UK immigration regulations. Scientologist chapels do not qualify as places of worship under the law. The Prison Service does not recognize Scientology as a religion for the purpose of facilitating prison visits by ministers, although prisoners who are adherents of Scientology are free to register their adherence and to manifest their beliefs consistent with good order and discipline in prisons. To meet the needs of individual prisoners, the Prison Service allows any prisoner registered as a Scientologist to have access to a representative of the Church of Scientology if he wishes to receive its ministry.

The Reverend Sun Myung Moon, leader of the Unification Church, has been excluded from the country since 2003 following a decision by the Home Secretary. Reverend Moon subsequently applied for entry clearance to enable him to visit. This was refused as a consequence of the exclusion, and Reverend Moon appealed this refusal on human rights grounds. An Immigration Adjudicator dismissed this appeal in April 2004.

In August 2004, new immigration regulations came into force, requiring visa applicants who wish to enter the country as ministers of religion to obtain level 4 competence in spoken English (on a scale of 1 to 9) on the International English Language Testing System. Visa adjudicators are permitted to waive the testing requirement at their discretion and where other evidence of English competency is provided, for applicants educated in an English-speaking country.

Other than some Anglican bishops' inclusion in the House of Lords, membership in a given religious group does not confer a political or economic advantage on individual adherents. The Anglican Archbishops of York and Canterbury; the Bishops of Durham, London, and Winchester; and 21 other bishops, in order of seniority, receive automatic membership in the House of Lords, whereas prominent clergy from other denominations or religions are not afforded this privilege. The Removal of Clergy Disqualification Act 2001 removed restrictions that prohibited all clergy ordained by an Anglican bishop, as well as ministers of the Church of Scotland, from seeking or holding membership in the House of Commons.

While not usually enforced and essentially a legal anachronism, blasphemy against Anglican doctrine remains technically illegal. Several religious organizations, in association with the Commission for Racial Equality, were attempting to abolish the law or broaden its protection to include all faiths. On January 13, 2005, Commission for Racial Equality Chairman Trevor Phillips told lawmakers that the Government's plan to enact legislation outlawing incitement to religious hatred should be paired with a repeal of the blasphemy law. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Government had not reviewed the question, and the blasphemy law had not been abolished or revised.

Several Christian groups criticized the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) for its January 8 broadcast of Jerry Springer: The Opera, alleging that the show was blasphemous. The Office of Communications (Ofcom), the independent telecommunications regulator, received more than 16,000 complaints about the broadcast. On May 9, 2005, Ofcom's Content Board stated that while many people were "deeply offended" by the broadcast, the program did not violate the regulator's standards. On March 3, the Christian Institute filed papers with the High Court, asking for a judicial review of whether the BBC had failed to uphold decency standards or violated legal guarantees of freedom of religion. At the end of the period covered by this report, the court had not ruled on whether to grant permission for the legal review. In addition, Christian Voice announced it plans to bring a private blasphemy prosecution against unnamed individuals responsible for the program. During the period covered by this report, Christian Voice had not served summonses on the defendants in its case.

On December 20, 2004, a violent protest led Birmingham theater executives to cancel the rest of the performances of the play "Bezhti." The play, whose name means "dishonor" in Punjabi, depicted rape and murder in a Sikh temple. Sikh community leaders requested that the play be rewritten so that the action does not take place within a temple, but the playwright, herself a Sikh, declined.

In relation to their percentage of the Northern Ireland population (44 percent), Catholics are underrepresented in the Police

Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI). Government-mandated measures to increase Catholic representation in the PSNI have raised the proportion of Catholics in the police to 17 percent, compared to 12 percent in 1999.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

#### **Forced Religious Conversion**

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### **Abuses by Terrorist Organizations**

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

#### **Section III. Societal Attitudes**

The generally amicable relationship among religions in British society contributed to religious freedom. In Northern Ireland, where centuries-old sectarian divisions persisted between the Protestant and Catholic communities, political and cultural differences contributed to problems between nationalists and unionists in Northern Ireland.

The police in Northern Ireland reported 122 attacks against both Catholic and Protestant churches, schools, and meeting halls in 2004. Such sectarian violence often coincides with tensions during the spring and summer marching season. However, the 2004 marching season was largely peaceful, with only one incident of interfaith violence in North Belfast. Negotiations involving parade organizers, leaders in nationalist and loyalist areas, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and government and police officials helped ensure public order.

From July 2004 through June 2005, the Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 482 anti-Semitic incidents in the United Kingdom. CST recorded 77 assaults and 43 instances of desecration and damage to property. The number of anti-Semitic incidents rose significantly during 2004. Figures from Israel's Global Forum against Anti-Semitism stated that 310 anti-Semitic incidents occurred in the United Kingdom during the year, of which 77 were violent, as opposed to 163 anti-Semitic incidents in 2003, of which 55 were violent. The report stated that a "central cause" of the increase in incidents was "years of hostile reporting and commentary about Israel in the UK press."

On August 22, 2004, cemetery officials discovered the desecration of approximately 60 gravestones in a Jewish cemetery in Birmingham. Police charged two suspects with racially aggravated criminal damage, racially aggravated public disorder, and causing racially aggravated harassment, alarm, or distress. On October 19, police charged Abu Hamza al-Masri with 16 criminal offenses, including soliciting or encouraging the murder of Jews, inciting racial hatred, and possessing a document that contained information "of a kind likely to be useful to a person committing or preparing an act of terrorism." At the end of the period covered by this report, his trial was pending.

The Muslim community was subject to intermittent incidents of Islamophobia, although no formal statistics were available. On January 15, 2005, an employment equality tribunal ruled in favor of a Muslim man whose employer dismissed him after he took 6 weeks off work to make a pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca. Prior to making his trip, the man had submitted a vacation request but received no response; a manager then told that him in the absence of a reply, he could assume his leave had been granted. Upon his return he was suspended without pay and then fired for gross misconduct, with his employer stating that his leave had not been authorized. The tribunal ruled that by not trying to accommodate the employee's religious requirement to go on Hajj or justifying a refusal to authorize his leave, the company was placing Muslim employees at a particular disadvantage and discriminating on the grounds of religion.

The Islamic community has criticized an increase in the use of the police's "stop and search" powers and arrests of Muslims under anti-terrorism laws, with only a handful of searches actually leading to arrests or convictions. In an Islamic Human Rights Commission poll released in December 2004, 80 percent of British Muslims (compared with 45 percent in 2000 and 35 percent in 1999) stated they had been discriminated against because of their faith.

On December 14, 2004, police arrested the leader of the British National Party (BNP) on suspicion of incitement to racial hatred. His arrest was the twelfth following the July broadcast of a BBC documentary entitled "Secret Agent" in which BNP members were covertly recorded as they called Islam a "vicious, wicked faith." At the end of the period covered by this report, the leader's trial was pending.

The United Kingdom has both active interfaith and ecumenical movements. The Council of Christians and Jews works to advance better relations between the two religions and to combat anti-Semitism. The Interfaith Network links a wide range of religious and educational organizations with an interest in interfaith relations, including the national representative bodies of the Baha'i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and Zoroastrian communities. The Network has a consultative relationship with the Home Office, from which it receives financial support. The Inner Cities Religious Council encourages interfaith activity through regional conferences and support for local initiatives. The NGO Respect continues to operate to

encourage voluntary time-sharing and mutual understanding among adherents of different religions.

The main ecumenical body is the Council of Churches for Britain and Ireland, which serves as the main forum for interchurch cooperation and collaboration. Interchurch cooperation is not limited to dealings among denominations at the national level. For example, Anglican parishes may share their church with Roman Catholic congregations.

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy**

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

The U.S. Embassy encouraged interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance. Embassy representatives attend regular meetings of the Three Faiths Forum, an interfaith dialog organization. In December 2004, the Embassy cosponsored with the Three Faiths Forum a visit by Iraqi religious leaders to learn from the United Kingdom's interfaith experience. On October 21, 2004, the Chargé d'Affaires hosted Iftar for Muslim leaders in the country at the end of Ramadan. Embassy officers were in regular contact with the Board of Jewish Deputies, the Chief Rabbi's Office, the Muslim College, and the Muslim Council of Britain.

In Edinburgh, consular officers met with the interfaith alliances of Glasgow and other cities and with Muslim leaders in several cities. They also spoke on religion and politics to the Jewish Literary Society and the Scottish American Studies Association. The Embassy sent a senior Scottish rabbi to the U.S. on an International Visitor program. Consulate officials were in regular contact with leaders of the Church of Scotland, Scottish Episcopal Church, Roman Catholic Church, and the Jewish and Muslim communities.

In Northern Ireland, long-standing issues related to national identity have been part of political and economic friction between Protestant and Catholic communities. As an active supporter of the peace process, the U.S. Government has encouraged efforts to diminish sectarian tension and promote dialogue between these two communities.

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